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Carpenters' Union Quits AFL-CIO

"The War Has Begun!"

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

There have been audacious moments in the bureaucratic history of American organized labor, moments when, despite the power-seeking, membership-squeezing impulses of autocratic leaders, some matter of true principle was at issue. Doug McCarron's recent decision to pull the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners out of the AFL-CIO is not one of them.

This is the first time a union president has broken with the labor federation since 1968, when Walter Reuther took the United Auto Workers out over the AFL's support for the Vietnam War. Reuther was a despot, an accommodationist to racists in the industry and his own union, and an enforcer for the liberal establishment against radical challenges, but opposing the war was not simply a rhetorical feint. McCarron has arrayed himself in the vestments of reform, writing to AFL president John Sweeney on March 29 that he was sick of watching labor's numbers decline, sick of wasting dues money on a growing Washington bureaucracy, with no change in site. On its own there is some justice to the argument, but as Mike Orfelt, editor of the battling pro-democracy building trades newsletter *Hard Hat*, put it, with McCarron "you have to measure a thimble-full of justice against an ocean of crime."

McCarron's pr machine has so successfully promoted him as a reformer that even in left labor circles it's common to hear people talk of the Carpenters' organizing dynamism; at the other end, *Business Week* says McCarron has "a lot of credibility on the subject of reform". But though the Carpenters' stable of organizers numbers 600 — many of them staff who simply got a name change — membership is barely keeping pace with attrition. In 1968 the union had

about 800,000 members; last year it had 323,929 according to the constituency it posted with the AFL, though McCarron boasts 500,000, and that's the number the newspapers print. But, as always, the rhetoric of "Organize or Die" (McCarron's battle cry) and even the numbers are secondary to the fundamental question, Organize for what?

"War" is the short answer to that question, and "war" is more than a rumor flying through the building trades these days. At the crudest, most self-interested level the only reason any union belongs to the AFL-CIO is to buy a form of anti-raiding insurance: the federation mediates disputes between unions over jurisdiction, a regulatory system meant to keep unions from stealing the work and the members of other unions. McCarron doesn't use words like "stealing" and "war"; instead, he talks about building a "wall-to-wall union", applying an industrial organizing model to construction. But McCarron's particular spin on it is best revealed by a speech he gave in Hawai'i to the National Erectors Association, five days before he wrote his high-minded letter to Sweeney.

"You need the freedom to assign the work based on what makes sense", he told the construction bosses, "what makes all of us competitive on the job. If there's a dispute, let the owner settle it. It's his money and his job. Surely, we've learned that much.... While industry was demanding more for its construction dollar, our answer was to shut down your job while we argued over whether an iron worker or a millwright did your rigging. We not only refused to help solve the problem, but we refused to admit there was a problem."

"We're serious about reorganizing the industry," concluded the great union reformer, (Carpenters continued on page 4)

Our Little Secrets

PUTIN & SON: RAFTING THE COLORADO

A couple of years ago Vladimir Putin journeyed to the American Southwest to take his natural son on an initiation ritual. The boy's mother is now an American citizen. First stop was a big game ranch in Texas, where Putin and Jr blasted zebras, antelopes and bison. Apparently, Putin, reenacting a scene out of Mailer's *Why Are We In Vietnam*, marked his son's forehead in the blood of one of these hapless creatures.

Then it was on to Moab, Utah, for a raft trip down Cataract Canyon on the Colorado River, one of the world's most demanding stretches of whitewater. The Moab river guide community is still shaking its head from its close encounter with the Russian president and former KGB man. "We get a lot of whacked-out people coming down the river, but Putin really is a dangerous guy, a real mobster," a guide told CounterPunch in late March.

"His packs were loaded with guns, vodka and tens of thousands of dollars in cash," the guide said. "He seemed to be a little on edge. It was during a time when it was unclear what was going to happen to

the Yeltsin government. He was a real bully. He was drunk much of the time and bossed people around as if they were his personal slaves. His son caught a channel catfish and they slapped it down in front of the guide and demanded that it be cooked up immediately."

Cataract Canyon is in the heart of Canyonlands National Park, one of the most dramatic landscapes in the world. But Putin and son were soon bored with the redrock canyons and class five rapids. "By the third day, Putin was demanding that the guides call in a helicopter to have his party picked up and flown out. Then he got drunk and started bragging about how many people he had personally killed. More than 40."

The rafts finally exited Cataract and motored across 30 miles of Lake Powell's flat water to the marina complex known as Hite. The old town of Hite now lies submerged under 200 feet of water. The next step on the Putins' tour was supposed to be a four-wheeler excursion tearing up the desert in the bizarre Needles District of Canyonlands Park. But Putin opted for a more traditional form of initiation for his son, straight out of *Notes from the Underground*. From the Hite marina, he placed a call to Las Vegas.

"We want some whores," Putin shouted into his cellphone. "Price is no object."

GRACENOTE

CounterPunch welcomes Oliver, bouncing new arrival in the family of our business manager Becky Grant and her husband Dave. So you CounterPunchers renewing by phone (which we like), treat Becky real nice. She's got plenty on her hands.

LOCKERBIE TRIAL: UPROAR MOUNTS

In the first criticism of the verdict in the trial of two Libyans accused of planting the bomb that blew up Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on December 21, 1988, Hans Koechler, a distinguished Austrian philosopher appointed as one of five international observers at the trial at Zeist, in Holland by Secretary General Kofi Annan, has issued a well merited denunciation of the judges' bizarre conclusion. "In my opin-

ion", Koechler writes, "there seemed to be considerable political influence on the judges and the verdict."

Koechler's analysis of the proceedings, in which a panel of three Scottish judges found one of the two accused Libyans, Abdelbasset al-Megrahi, guilty, while exonerating his alleged co-conspirator, Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah, is by no means an exercise in legal esoterica. Basically, he points out that the judges found Megrahi guilty even though they themselves admitted that his identification by a Maltese shop owner (summoned by the prosecution to testify that Megrahi bought clothes later deemed to have been packed in the lethal suitcase-bomb) was "not absolute" and that there was a "mass of conflicting evidence".

Furthermore, Koechler queries the active involvement of senior US Justice Department officials as part of the Scottish prosecution team "in a supervisory role". No one should have needed an Austrian philosopher to point out that the verdict was a travesty. So feeble was the prosecution case that, last September, CounterPunch confidently predicted that the judges would have little option other than a unanimous "not guilty". We admit that our confidence was driven by a quixotic faith in the integrity of Scottish justice, spawned in our case by historical family associations with the Scottish judiciary, but shared by others, including Nelson Mandela, Muammar Qaddafi, many of the victims' relatives, the defendants themselves and all those who had previously resisted efforts to drag the accused in front of a US Federal Court or some similar Star Chamber.

Assuming a requisite degree of judicial impartiality, our prediction was further based on the fact that the prosecution case absolutely depended on proving beyond a reasonable doubt that Megrahi was the man who bought the clothes, traced by police to a Maltese clothes shop, and later packed in with the bomb. In 19 separate statements to police prior to the trial the shopkeeper, Tony Gauci, had failed to make a positive identification of Megrahi. In the witness box, Gauci was asked five times if he recognized anyone in the courtroom. No answer. Finally, the exasperated prosecutor pointed to the dock and asked if the man sitting on the left was the customer in question. Even so, the best that Gauci could do was to mumble that "he resembled him".

Gauci had also told the police that the man who bought the clothes was six feet tall and over 50 years of age. The evidence

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“Then Putin got drunk and started bragging about how many people he had personally killed. More than 40.”

at the trial established that Megrahi is 5 feet 8 inches tall and that in late 1988 he was 36 years of age. The clothes had been bought either on November 23 or December 7, 1988. Megrahi had been in Malta on December 7 but not on the November date. The shopkeeper recalled that the man who bought the clothes had also bought an umbrella because it was raining heavily outside. Maltese meteorological records introduced by the defense showed clearly that while it did rain all day on November 23, there was almost certainly no rain on December 7. If it did rain on that date, the shower would have been barely enough to wet the pavement. Nevertheless, the judges held it proven that Megrahi had bought the clothes on December 7.

No less vital to the prosecution case was its contention that the bomb that destroyed Pan Am 107 had been loaded as unaccompanied baggage onto an Air Malta flight to Frankfurt, flown on to London, and thence onto the ill fated flight to New York. In support of this, prosecutors produced a document from Frankfurt airport indicating that a bag had gone from the baggage handling station at which the Air Malta bags (along with those from other flights) had been unloaded and had been sent to the handling station for the relevant flight to London. On the other hand there was firm evidence from the defense that all the bags on the Air Malta flight had been accompanied and had been collected at the other end. Nevertheless, the judges held it proven that the lethal suitcase had indeed come from Malta.

The most likely explanations of the judges' decision to convict Megrahi despite the evidence, or lack of it, must be that either (a) they panicked at the thought of the uproar that would ensue on the American end if they let both of the Libyans off, or (b) they were simply given their marching orders by high authority in London. English judges are used to doing their duty in this manner — see, for example, the results of various “impartial” judicial enquiries into British atrocities in Northern Ireland over the years, including Bloody Sunday and the post-internment torture scandal — but we had hoped, foolishly so in retrospect, that the Scots were made of sterner stuff.

In closing arguments, the prosecution had stressed the point that Megrahi could not have planted the bomb without the as-

sistance of Fhimah; both defendants were equally guilty, and they stood or fell together. Nevertheless, the judges elected to find one of the two conspirators guilty and the other one innocent, a split verdict that Koechler finds “incomprehensible”. It is however entirely comprehensible if we accept that the judges knew that there was no evidence to convict either man but that it was politically imperative for them to send one of them down for twenty years and thereby pass the buck to the appeal court. Given the legally threadbare nature of the judge's 82 page “opinion” justifying their actions, many observers are assuming that the five man panel of judges who will eventually hear Megrahi's appeal will have to do the right thing. But that is what we said about the original trial.

OKLAHOMA CITY AND TIM McVEIGH

Drive along Interstate 40 through Oklahoma City, as a CounterPunch editor did in late March, and one is encouraged to make a detour into downtown, to whose renewal as a tourist destination McVeigh has made an ironic contribution. From Interstate 40 signs alert travellers to the correct route to the Oklahoma City National Memorial, the only feature of the city deemed worthy of such advertisement. There were maybe a couple of hundred visitors in an otherwise entirely empty downtown. Cockburn parked not so far from where Timothy McVeigh left his Ryder truck packed with 4,800 pounds of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil on April 19, 1995, lit the fuse and was driving out of town when the truck went up at 9.02 am, killing 168 people.

There's a chain link fence with various memorabilia stuck to it, poems by kids, and several irritating statements encased in plastic, written by Dr Paul Heath, self-described bombing “survivor”, who was in the VA on the fifth floor. A typical Heath-gram: “The bombing was surely an evil act that should not have happened. Because of this evil a white statue of Jesus now stands off-site with its back turned away from the site and facing 168 empty spaces in a black stone wall.”

The acreage previously occupied by the Alfred P. Murrah federal building now holds a vast reflecting pool bracketed by two modernist “gates of time”, respectively labelled

9.01 and 9.03. South of the pool there are 168 odd looking chairs, with high bronze backs and plastic seats which light up at night, each displaying a name. On a wall nearby there are the names of “survivors”. There's also a “survivor tree” from the 1920s, an elm that beat not only McVeigh but Dutch elm disease.

The old Journal Record building next door is now a memorial center, also housing an Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. In the shop you can buy a K-9 poster, featuring Bella (L.A. Search Dogs), Butch (Vancouver Fire and Rescue), Bethany (Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics), Keli (Woof Search and Rescue Unit) plus about 45 other dogs who had distinguished themselves in the post-bombing hours.

There's audio-visual evocation of the news noises on April 19, 1995, plus an effective tape of a fellow trying to get his permit to bottle and sell water. This proceeding was going on across the street and on the tape you hear the bomb go off and a sententious voice adds that the permit seeker was using government correctly for peaceful ends, unlike McVeigh. This is a theme sounded throughout the exhibition in many different ways, none more vigorously than when lauding the Oklahoma citizens and survivors who rushed to Washington DC to press (successfully) for rapid passage of the Effective Death Penalty Act.

The memorial is supposed to educate us about terror and about the bombing, yet an uninformed person could spend several hours in it and leave without knowing anything more about the perpetrator of the Oklahoma bombing, beyond the fact that he was white and his name was McVeigh. Certainly not that he was a veteran of the US Army, well trained to kill by Uncle Sam and actually quite vocal on his motives, which on his various accounts derived from government tyranny, the federal onslaughts at Ruby Ridge and Waco plus the attack on Iraq.

McVeigh's role is advertised by just one photograph, the familiar one of the US Army vet being marched along in orange jumpsuit and handcuffs by FBI men. You wouldn't know anything about the man who parked the Ryder truck in front of the Murrah building, beyond the fact that he was white. You wouldn't know he was born in Pendleton, near Buffalo, that his father was a working (OLS continued on page 6)

(AFL continued from page 1)

"We're serious about customer service."

McCarron's is the language of the temp agency, and dissident carpenters say that's exactly the wall-to-wall model he will emulate. Workers, already no more than dues units in the Carpenters, will simply be a guaranteed labor supply, at a price competitive not with the other construction unions but with the temps of huge worker mills like Labor Ready. You want a sweeper, you want a hod carrier, a plumber, a frame setter, a finisher; the Carpenters will supply them all, at bargain wages.

McCarron will have to do better than the temp agencies, but in a hundred ways over his five-year reign he's signaled that he's striving not for the loyalty and affection of workers, which would drive wages up, but for the loyalty and affection of the contractors, which can only have the opposite affect. Already in the Bay Area the Carpenters have underpriced the Laborers Union for low-wage work, creating a category called "scrapper" at \$6 an hour. It has introduced piecework into its contracts, something usually associated with sweatshops and strawberry fields. At present, union carpenters make from \$14 to \$34 an hour, but McCarron sees the future in signing up legions of non-union workers who will toil below scale, for fewer benefits.

As Ken Little, chairman of Carpenters for a Democratic Union (CDU), who challenged McCarron for the presidency last year, says, "McCarron is turning our union into a corporate business and trying to make its members into a Labor Ready organization for the job market." Orfelt fears that construction sites, already dirty, dangerous places to work, will only become worse, as unions fight over who gets the work, who gets the paycheck. In other words, Organize and Die.

It's telling that McCarron gave his "customer service" speech to the Erectors Association, whose main line of work would normally be the province of the Iron Workers Union, the guys who put up the steel skeletons of large buildings. The Carpenters have set up a vast training facility in Las Vegas, and if its anything like the regional training centers it will be equipped to instruct neophytes in a full range of construction skills. (Astoundingly, some of the subcontractors on the \$22 million International Training Center were non-union.) In the union's school in central Illinois the millwright shop has plumbing equipment scattered throughout. When a carpenter taking a tour of the place made a comment to the effect, "What's

all this plumbing shit doing here?" the program coordinator quickly whisked the group away. David Johnson, who relayed that story from Champaign on a CDU listserve, also reported that a big concrete contractor, River City Construction, "one of the worst companies in the area to work for, has terminated its contract with the Iron Workers in Champaign and Springfield, weeks before their contracts were up for negotiation. The Iron Workers Business Agent in our city has said that the company intends to do this in other cities. In the words of the Iron Worker B.A., 'The war has begun!'"

These are not buoyant times for the AFL-CIO. It put more time and money than ever into electing Al Gore, and while union turnout was immense, about one-third of union voters went with Bush. Down went ergonomic standards. Down went the Democrats on tax cuts and so probably soon on Medicare. Meanwhile, Oklahoma's Democratic legislature voted to put a "right to work" statute to a referendum, "paycheck protection"

"McCarron is turning our union into a corporate business."

schemes continue to be hatched, and the details of campaign finance reform could mean the end of union coordination in local political races all over the country.

Worst of all, down have tumbled union membership numbers, as 160,000 manufacturing workers lost their jobs in 2000 and new organizing fell flat. Only 9 percent of private sector workers are unionized now, from 9.4 percent in 1999. Government jobs are the only growth area for unions, which made it especially pathetic to watch union people pull out all the stops while Gore boasted that he'd personally overseen the slashing of 377,000 jobs as part of his Reinventing Government project.

Sweeney and his team tried moral suasion to get recalcitrant unions to organize, and sunk many millions of dollars into industry-wide drives: the strawberry campaign, the New Orleans tourist industry campaign, the Seattle SUN campaign, the Las Vegas Building Trades Organizing Project. All of them top-down affairs, all of them dead or in disarray for a variety of reasons, not least, in the case of BTOP, the failure of McCarron's Carpenters and the other construction unions to work together. The AFL tried cajoling its central labor councils and state federations to mobilize, organize. Who talks now of Union Cities? McCarron blasted the AFL for inflating its staff, but it's no se-

cret that probably the biggest expansion, in the field mobilization department, was undertaken to try to get around do-nothing local and state bodies, a great many of which are controlled by the building trades.

Six years ago, when "organizing" became the official mantra of institutional labor, a few voices in the wilderness raised the question "For what?" Always the answer that came back was "Power". Ideally, rank-and-file power but, absent that, power in numbers would do. Union democracy was at best a secondary issue, derided by labor's intellectual light artillery as the preoccupation of a left fringe; certainly it was not something that the AFL or anyone in a position of union leadership could talk about. With McCarron's war cry, the soulless limits of such reform are terribly plain.

Here is a union boss whose own membership marched in protest against him at the Carpenter's national convention last summer. He and his dynastic predecessors have spent their careers strangling in its crib every

internal organizing effort, every campaign that raised questions of who controlled funds, who controlled jobs, who controlled the union. "They're Carpenters," a union dissident said, "they eat their young."

Rank and file members had no say in the matter of their union's exit from the AFL and have almost no say in the way their union is run. They don't elect their top leaders; most of them don't even get to vote on their contracts. McCarron has stripped their locals of power, investing authority in regional councils whose leadership he manipulates into place. McCarron's best friends are developers and contractors. He sits on the board of Perini Construction.

Marty Conlisk, a militant electrician who works with Labor Beat video, attended the Carpenters convention last year and said, "I experienced a most fascist display of power. If they would have put searchlights around the perimeter, it could not have had such an intimidating effect. Absolutely frightening. If it wasn't for Ken Little and the other candidates speaking out for democracy, I would have gone out back and hung myself." Now he says his own local meetings, of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, are dominated by intramural discussion — who's trying to get whom. Welcome to the brave new world of reform. CP

The Fake Fight on Campaign Finance

Heralded by a chorus of pieties from the liberal press, the McCain-Feingold bill passed the senate on April 2 and has now moved to the House, where the former roach exterminator from Texas, Tom Delay, has vowed to kill it. He'd be shrewder to let the bill pass.

Why? Well, the McCain-Feingold bill wasn't that much to begin with. Indeed, it resembled nothing so much as Hillary's health care proposal, a nominal reform measure that might well create new and hidden opportunities for political chicanery and corruption. The bill did have a few teeth. But most of those were extracted well before senate passage and the addition of new exemptions making it easier for millionaires to give more to the candidates of their choice.

NPR, the New York Times, the Washington Post and other elite opinion-makers have already announced that the passage of the bill by the senate signals a new era in reformist politics, as if the congress was enacting a kind of purification ritual, cleansing it of past sins.

Some of those sins are quite recent, as with giveaways piling up in the tax bill, hand outs to energy companies, rollback of the ergonomics rules. And on and on. It's simply inconceivable that the very same congress that approved the bankruptcy bill (as dictated by lawyers for the credit card companies) by a grotesquely lopsided margin only a few weeks ago is somehow now genuinely interested in shielding itself from the corrosive influence of the rich and the big corporations.

McCain and Feingold largely sat silent as their bill was ravaged by the lords of the senate, such as Pete Domenici, Republican from New Mexico who offered an amendment to raise the hard money contribution limit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and increase the total annual hard money contributions per individual from \$25,000 to \$37,500. Domenici couched his argument in populist rhetoric. He said the boost was needed to help candidates compete with self-financed multimillionaires. The amendment passed easily. It was co-sponsored by Illinois' Dick Durbin, now the leading liberal in the senate.

"Raising hard money contributions limits for candidates facing wealthy self-funded opponents simply tightens the iron grip of special interests' hold over our political sys-

tem," says Nick Nyhart, director of Public Campaign. "This cure is worse than the disease. As it is, a tiny group of donors are funding our politicians. In the 2000 elections, just one-eighth of one percent of voters gave a campaign contribution of \$1,000 or more to a candidate. Allowing them to give three or six times as much will only increase the power of this unrepresented group who want legislative favors in return for their contributions." These contributors are largely white, male, and wealthy.

To maximize their influence and evade hard money restrictions, corporate executives have learned to bundle their donations by recruiting family members and col-

McCain and Feingold sat silent as their bill was ravaged.

leagues to each give the maximum contribution. To see how this works we have only to look at the money behind the passage of the bankruptcy bill. Last year, credit card giant MBNA gave \$365,725 in bundled hard money contributions to members of the senate judiciary committee alone. This committee had jurisdiction over the crafting of the bankruptcy bill that served to bail out MBNA and screw its credit card customers. MBNA also gave the Bush campaign \$240,700 in bundled contributions. Under the new measure, MBNA could double or triple these numbers.

The main selling point of the McCain-Feingold bill is its cap on soft money contributions to political parties. But the soft money caps are more than compensated for by the hikes in hard money limits. Corporations gave about a half billion dollars to the parties in the last election cycle. But the new hard money limits will allow contributions to increase to \$760 million.

The bill escaped the clutches of that newfound defender of the First Amendment, Senator Mitch "Money Talks" McConnell, the Kentucky Republican, who had singlehandedly derailed the bill in past sessions. "McConnell could have mothballed the bill procedurally, but he didn't try," a Republican staffer tells CounterPunch. "The marching orders were to put up a fake fight, excise some of the most unpalatable sections, then give

McCain his triumph."

McCain himself seems weary with the entire endeavor. Perhaps his struggle with cancer has dampened some of the old fire. As for Feingold, he has used the Bush presidency to complete his transformation from perhaps the most principled member of the senate to Pecksniffian piety, as evinced by his role in undermining any effective Democratic opposition in the Senate to the nomination of Ashcroft as Attorney General. Feingold is Gene McCarthy without the wit and the spine. For example, he voted against an amendment offered by Paul Wellstone that would have permitted states to underwrite public financing of federal campaign. Feingold claimed that the measure would have violated the bi-partisan nature of the bill.

Bush would be shrewd to buck the Cromagnons in his party, such as DeLay, on this one and sign the bill if it reaches him. After all, it deprives McCain of his signature issue and thus almost certainly staves off a primary challenge from the Arizona wild man in 2004.

Ultimately, the McCain-Feingold bill favors incumbents and serves to further insulate the two conjoined parties from independent challenges. The message isn't lost on Green Party organizers. "The senate rejected public financing of campaigns, discounted postal rates and free air time for candidates," Carol Miller, of the New Mexico Green Party, tells us. "This so-called reform bill actually serves to protect the current corrupt system from reform." CP

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man, employed by GM, that McVeigh was an okay student but couldn't get a job in the Reagan recession of the Eighties that laid waste the old industrial north-east. He did briefly work as a security guard in a warehouse in the awful racist, upstate town of Cheektowaga. Decorated veteran of the Iraqi war? There's no mention of McVeigh's military career.

The photographs of McVeigh outside the Branch Davidian compound near Waco during the siege are also nowhere to be found, though they advertise McVeigh's prime stated motivation, to strike back at the federal government that killed over 80 civilians including 24 children. There is a large map of the United States in the exhibit rooms.

McVeigh, scheduled to meet the Reaper this coming May, is certainly more coherent than the memorialists in Oklahoma City, who have produced a self-congratulatory mishmash of kitsch. Here's a couple of paragraphs from his handwritten submission to Media By-Pass in 1998: "Remember Dresden? How about Hanoi? Tripoli? Baghdad? What about the big ones - Hiroshima and Nagasaki? (At these two locations, the US killed at least 150,000 noncombatants - mostly women and children - in the blink of an eye. Thousands more took hours, days, weeks, or months to die.) If Saddam is such a demon, and people are calling for war crimes charges against him and his nation, why do we not hear the same cry for blood directed at those responsible for even greater amounts of 'mass destruction' - like those responsible and involved in dropping bombs on the cities mentioned above?

"The truth is, the U.S. has set the standard when it comes to the stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruction. Hypocrisy

when it comes to the death of children? In Oklahoma City, it was family convenience that explained the presence of a day-care center placed between street level and the law enforcement agencies which occupied the upper floors of the building. Yet when discussion shifts to Iraq, any day-care center in a government building instantly becomes 'a shield.' Think about that. (Actually, there is a difference here. The administration has admitted to knowledge of the presence of children in or near Iraqi government buildings, yet they still proceed with their plans to bomb - saying that they cannot be held responsible if children die. There is no such proof, however, that knowledge of the pres-

The memorial is a mishmash of kitsch.

ence of children existed in relation to the Oklahoma City bombing.)"

Visitors to the Memorial seemed vaguely unsatisfied by the displays. The Memorial could have offered them so much more, had its organizers opted to transcend self-congratulation and banality. How about a weekly drama or even debate in front of the Survivor Tree about the nature of terrorism, a dissection of McVeigh's professed motives, a comparison of terrorist acts around the world, perpetrated by states and by individuals. Would not the tourists, some of them retired from the military, have relished an event of this nature?

But the Memorial's organizers have declined all such avenues of opportunity. Better to sit tight and deal with the onslaught as a vacuum between 9.01 and 9.03, as a

terrible piece of bad luck when Mom might not have left her kid off at the child care center on the second floor, when the HUD secretary on the Fifth Floor might have taken the day off, might have stepped back a couple of yards just before the floor fell away. Safer to think of the attack in the Midwestern heartland as a matter involving senselessness and bad luck rather than political events and historical circumstances.

McVeigh's American as apple pie too, not least in the media-obsessed grotesquerie of his (presumptively) final days, trying to have his "state-assisted suicide" screened on national tv, wishing he could smuggle out his sperm to female admirers, planning to cry out "168 to 1" in his final statement. That's a lousy, evil way to assess the efficacy of political terror, but after all, look at the outfit that trained him up for his terrible deed.

WHINY LITTLE GUY

Our view of Bush Jr, the White House incumbent, has always been that he's a mommy's boy, who spent his early years monitoring Barbara's resentment under the broiling sun of Midland or Odessa as George Sr gallivanted around the globe. Confirmation of this view comes with news that a fellow who held high position in the cabinet of Bush Sr put his name forward for a job in George Jr's team, waited by the phone which failed to ring. He finally called Bush Sr and asked him to put in a good word. "No use talking to me," Bush Sr told him amiably. "I've got no pull at all. Best thing for you to do is call Barbara."

The former first lady, please note, is pulling down \$45,000 a lecture. If it was HRC, the press would be aflame.CP

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CounterPunch Exclusive! Putin's Drunken Colorado Safari